

PARSHAT KEDOSHIM

27 Nissan-3 Iyar 5784
5-11 May 2024

Torah: Leviticus 19:1-20:27
Haftorah: Ezekiel 20:2-20

Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

Psalms Daily

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Pirkei Avot (2:1)

"Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would say: Which is the right path for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it, and harmonious for mankind."

The Torah on Dirty Words

Question:

Just curious, what is the Jewish stance on cursing and curse words? I've heard the line that our bodies are a temple, and that defaming G-d's name is very bad, but what about a little curse here or there when you are really mad? Thanks. :)

Response:

Think of someone wise, kind and caring. The type of man or woman you deeply respect and look up to as a role model.

Could you imagine such a person spewing out filthy language in a sudden moment of rage? Probably not. And for good reason. It just isn't a holy thing to do.

In the beginning of the Torah portion of Kedoshim, we read an enigmatic instruction: Kedoshim Tihyu, "Be holy." This is different from the many other commandments that follow, which pertain to specific matters such as marital and ritual purity or holiness. The sages explain that the Hebrew word Kadosh, which is normally translated as "holy," actually means to be "distinct" or "separate." Thus, these words are actually a commandment to separate ourselves.

Separate from what? From vulgar language, for one.

To paraphrase Nachmanides, while the Torah forbids various behaviors and foods, at the same time it does permit intimacy between husband and wife, and the consumption of kosher meat and wine. Thus, there can be a glutton who eats only kosher food; a drunkard who drinks only kosher wine; and a married man whose behavior with his wife is lewd, even though she is permissible to him. Or there may be a person who speaks in a disgusting manner, something that is not specifically prohibited in the Torah. Thus, it is possible for a person to actually be—in the classic words of Nachmanides—

"disgusting with the permission of Torah."

In other words, Torah itself demands that you go beyond the parameters it sets for you and live a life that is truly distinguished and uplifted. The Torah tells you that to be holy; it's not enough to "do this and don't do this." There's something you must do on your own to get up there: to go beyond just following instructions, at least a small step.

The truth is that using bad language does more than keep you from being one step above. It actually schleps you down.

The Talmud speaks very harshly about one who speaks in a vulgar way. Although we generally think of speech as just a superficial act, in truth it has a strong impact on your inner self. The words that leave your mouth make an imprint on your mind and heart. No matter how high up you are the rope of fine, noble character, a few rotten words can throw you back down to the ground.

And the flip side is also true. A crude person can become more refined if he improves the way he speaks. This is why Shemirat Halashon, "guarding one's tongue," is considered one of the first steps that need to be taken before correcting more serious character flaws. So, is a choice word after stubbing a toe a horrible sin? Perhaps not. But being careful that all words that leave your mouth are holy is an important part of a living the "holy" life of a Jew.

By Yisroel Cotler

When Restraint Is Power

Have you ever felt like losing your temper but at the last moment you managed to restrain yourself? Inner battles of this kind are often associated with traffic wardens and similar representatives of officialdom. Sometimes they are found in encounters on the domestic front as well...

The Parshah of Kedoshim (Leviticus chapters 19-20) starts with the idea that we should be holy. What exactly does this mean? The commentator Rashi explains that the term "holy"

implies self-restraint. There are many temptations in life. To be holy means to have the ability to control one's immediate impulses. Another commentator, Nachmanides, makes the point that this self-restraint may sometimes take a person to a point beyond the simple letter of the law. Jewish law permits a person to eat kosher food: but should one be an out-and-out glutton? According to this view, even if the food is as kosher as could be, restraint is power; it shows that one is truly free as an individual, rather than just being just a slave of one's appetite. Do you remember the story of Jacob and Esau and the plate of lentils? One way of understanding that story is that Esau was ready to sell his birthright, the most precious thing in his life, for a plate of food. One response might be: "How pathetic!" Others might feel sympathy with someone who is sometimes a slave to his senses. They might say that after all, this is our human situation. Nonetheless, many people would expect a person to aspire to be master of his or her own being; in control. A human being, yes. An animal — no. Much of the Parshah is devoted to giving guidelines about this kind of self-mastery, in a number of different areas of life. Central is the theme of personal relationships. The keynote to these is the famous teaching "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Rabbi Akiva said that this is the great principle of the Torah; it relates to all other aspects of Jewish thought. The Parshah also instructs us not to take revenge, nor even to bear a grudge. This certainly needs self-control: in our actions, our words and even our thoughts. Imagine such a person! Does he or she actually exist? We can imagine a very simple, naive, or even inspired kind of person, who never sees bad in anyone. Or we can imagine a person of power, who has acquired genuine inner self-mastery. What is power? For a long time people thought that it



means mastery over others. Now we realize, it is mastery over oneself. Daily life presents us with many instances of the personal battles described in our Parshah: in relationships with our parents, in business dealing, in questions about giving charity, in

the borders between men and women, and also regarding our behavior when we are genuinely in power over others, as judges. Thus, the portion tells us to be fair in judgment to both rich and poor. The portion presents the challenge of the power of restraint, building a

world of goodness for the future, when the whole world will be filled with holiness.

By Tali Loewenthal

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RABBI SAADIA GAON (circa 882 – 942)

Rabbi Saadia Gaon, one of the towering figures in Jewish history, led world Jewry through the first half of the tenth century. Born in Egypt circa 882 CE, Rabbi Saadia Gaon's brilliance bloomed early. Before 20, he penned the "Agron," a Hebrew dictionary and grammar that unlocked the intricacies of the sacred tongue. This prodigy soon became a champion of tradition, wielding his pen like a sword against the Karaite sect of Judaism who challenged rabbinic interpretations of the Torah.

Driven by a desire to illuminate the Torah for all, Saadia embarked on a grand project: a translation and commentary on the Tanakh in Arabic, the language of many of the Jews of his time. His "Tafsir" became a treasure trove of insights, bridging the gap

between ancient scriptures and contemporary realities. His intellectual fervor didn't stop there. He wrote "Emunos v'Deos," a philosophical masterpiece that countered doubts and uncertainties, reaffirming Judaism's beauty and

The Geonim (lit. "Geniuses") were the spiritual leaders of world Jewry from the 7th century CE, following the release of the Talmud, until their gradual decline in the 11th century. They headed the great Babylonian Talmudical academies (Yeshivot) of Sura and Pumbedisa, which had been founded in the early third century. They also responded to queries regarding Jewish religious and civil law from Jewish communities from across the world, stretching from current-day Iran to Morocco and Spain.

relevance for generations to come.

His dedication and wisdom, including in areas such as astronomy, earned him the prestigious title of Gaon, the head of the renowned Sura academy in Babylonia (current-day Iraq). This position, however, came with challenges. When the Resh Galusa, or Exilarch, the government-recognized leader of the Jewish community, and a descendant of King David, acted unjustly, Saadia's unwavering integrity clashed with authority. A temporary exile ensued, but even amid upheaval, Saadia's pen remained prolific, further enriching the Jewish intellectual landscape.

Ultimately, his commitment prevailed. He returned to Sura, reconciled with the Resh Galusa, and even mentored the son of his

former rival. In Iyar of 4702, or 942 CE, at around the age of 60, Rabbi Saadia Gaon laid down his pen, leaving behind a legacy that transcended generations. He was succeeded as Gaon in Sura by Rabbi Natronai ben Shabbetai Gaon.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, May 5, 2024-27 Nissan, 5784 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943)

In the summer of 1942, about 300,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw to Treblinka. When reports of the mass murder in the killing center leaked back to the Warsaw ghetto, an organized resistance began forming, which managed to smuggle a modest cache of arms into the ghetto. On the 14th of Nissan of 1943, the remaining 35,000 Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto (from an original 450,000) staged an organized uprising and drove back the Nazis with a rain of bullets when they came to begin the final removal of all Jews. The Jewish resistance lasted 27 days. A heroic stand was made in an underground bunker under 18 Mila Street, where hundreds of fighters, including the 24-year-old leader of the uprising, Mordechai Anilevitch, met their death. Although the Ghetto was burned to the ground by Iyar 3, a few stray survivors hid in the rubble and fired at the Nazis for two months longer.

Monday, May 6, 2024-28 Nissan, 5784 Jericho's Wall Collapses (1273 BCE)

On the seventh day of the encirclement of Jericho, the Jews, accompanied by the Holy Ark, circled the city seven times. After the blowing of the shofar, the walls miraculously crashed and sank, leaving the city open and unprotected. Jericho was easily conquered.

Buchenwald Liberated (1945)

On the 27th of Nissan 5705, the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald was liberated by the US Army.

Thursday, May 9, 2024-1 Iyar, 5784

Construction of 2nd Temple (370 BCE)

Fifty-three years following the destruction of the First Holy Temple (see Jewish History for the 9th of Av), Zerubabel and Joshua the High Priest began construction of the Second Temple, with permission from King Cyrus of Persia. The offering of sacrifices had actually commenced a few months earlier, on the vacant lot where the 1st Temple stood, however it was only after the construction started on the 1st of Iyar that the Levites began accompanying the service with song and music. The construction was later halted after the hostile Samaritans supplied false slanderous information to Cyrus about the Jews' intentions. The construction was resumed many years later and completed 21 years later under the reign of King Darius (see Jewish History for the Third of Adar).

Passing of R. Menachem Mendel of Horodok (1788)

Chassidic master Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok (1730?-1788), also known as Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, was one of the leading disciples of the second leader of the Chassidic Movement, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch. Upon the latter's passing in 1772, R. Menachem Mendel was regarded by his colleagues as the

leader of the Chassidic community in Russia, and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi considered him his rebbe and mentor. In 1777, R. Menachem Mendel led a group of 300 Chassidim to the Holy Land and established Chassidic communities in Safed and Tiberias. Rabbi Menachem Mendel passed away on the 1st of Iyar of 1788 and is buried in Tiberias.

Shabbat, May 11, 2024-3 Iyar, 5784

Ancona Boycott (1556)

Following the Portuguese Expulsion in 1496 (see Jewish History for the 22nd of Tevet) many Jews who chose to remain in Portugal became known as "Marranos," openly identified themselves as Christians, while secretly maintaining Jewish beliefs and traditions. On the 3rd of Iyar in 1556, on the orders of Pope Paul IV, 25 of these hidden Jews were burnt at the stake in Ancona, Italy. Gracia Mendes Nasi was a very influential and wealthy woman; herself a Portuguese crypto Jew who relocated to the Ottoman Empire. In her past, she, too, had personally experienced persecution because of her status. Upon hearing about the burning of her co-religionists, she organized a financial boycott against the port of Ancona. She called on all Jews to do trade from the neighboring harbors and thus financially ruin Ancona. Her trade embargo was successful for a few months and is considered to be one of the first times the Jews struck back against the Inquisition.